

USCIS Requires COVID-19 Vaccinations for Legal Permanent Residents

Alert

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By Elizabeth Chatham

Starting October 1, 2021, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the U.S. Department of State will require COVID-19 vaccinations for applicants for refugee or lawful permanent residence (green cards), with some exceptions. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has released technical instructions for panel physicians and civil surgeons that incorporate COVID-19 vaccination for all eligible applicants for both refugee and legal permanent residence status. An immigrant may be considered inadmissible and may have their green card application denied without being fully vaccinated. Panel physicians are designated by the U.S. Department of State and provide immigration medical examinations as part of the visa processing at U.S. Embassies or Consulates abroad. A civil surgeon is a doctor who performs medical examinations to immigrants who are already in the U.S.

The World Health Organization has previously deemed COVID-19 to be a public health emergency of international concern. In addition, under 42 U.S.C. § 264 and Executive Order 13295 (as amended by 13375 and 13674), COVID-19 meets the definition of a communicable disease requiring quarantine, thus making it a Class A Inadmissible Condition as a basis for permanent residence in the U.S.

The U.S. Advisory Committee for Immigration Practices has recommended age-appropriate COVID-19 vaccinations of the general U.S. population. The COVID-19 vaccinations meet the mandatory vaccination criteria for applicants for refugee or legal permanent residence status. Any applicant who receives medical examination by either a panel physician or civil surgeon on or after October 1, 2021 will be subject to the COVID-19 vaccination series.

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The civil surgeon must physically inspect and confirm the applicant's documentation that he or she has received all appropriate doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. The proper review of vaccination documentation will be in the form of a vaccination record, copy of a medical chart with physician entries or by appropriate medical personnel. Self-reported vaccine doses without written documentation will not be accepted. The Form I-693 must be completed by the civil surgeon and document the COVID-19 formulation and the number of doses given. Blanket waivers will be applicable for the COVID-19 vaccine, including when the vaccine is not age appropriate, medical contraindication to the vaccine, and vaccine unavailability or lack of access in their country.

It is recommended that immigrant applicants pursue the vaccination series as quickly as possible, ideally prior to their medical examinations with either a civil surgeon or panel physician.

[More information can be found on the CDC website.](#)

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